

welcome to Southeast Asia



Elemental Forces

The life-giving force of water has sculpted many Southeast Asian landscapes. The jungle-topped islands of the Malay peninsula are cradled by coral reefs that tame the ocean into azure pools. The languorous Vietnamese coastline greets the South China Sea from tip to tail, while inland there are karst mountains – evidence of long-vanished oceans. And the muddy Mekong River lopes through tightly knit mountains to flat rice baskets. The traditional ‘highways’ of Borneo are tannin-stained rivers that slice through the wilderness. And the volcanoes of Indonesia and the Philippines provide a glimpse into the earth’s blacksmithing core.

Spiritual Spaces

Southeast Asia bathes in spirituality. With the dawn, pots of rice come to a boil and religious supplications waft from earth to sky. Barefoot monks silently move through dull-lit streets collecting food alms from the faithful; prayers bellow from needle-tipped mosques calling the devotees to bend to earth in submission; family altars are tended like thirsty houseplants. And the region’s great monuments have been built for the divine, from Angkor’s heaven incarnate to Bagan’s infinity-bending temple expanse. This is a region in close communication with the divine. Visitors can join in on the conversation on meditation retreats or by hiking into the mist



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Exotic and tropical, friendly and hospitable, historic and devout, Southeast Asia offers a warm embrace, from its sun-kissed beaches and steamy jungles to its bustling modern cities and sleepy villages.

(left) Buddhist monks travelling by motorcycle taxi, Siem Reap
(below) Rice paddies in northern Vietnam



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belt to visit a golden-spired temple or sacred mountain.

A Marriage of Old & New

Southeast Asian cities grabbed on to the future long before it became the present. Bangkok's masses zip between shopping malls aboard sky-suspended trains. Affluent Singapore shows off its multicultural heritage like a fashion show and Ho Chi Minh City is in a race to the top of the commercial heap. In between these modern marvels are rickety wooden villages filled with yawning dogs and napping grannies, where the agricultural clock measures out the rice planting and harvest seasons. These rural landscapes are best visited via

human power: by cycling past sandal-clad villagers and curious children or trekking through high-altitude hill-tribe villages.

A Bountiful Harvest

In the absence of winter, the earth here is always pregnant with ambrosial fruits, spices once as prized as gold, and the staple, rice, which is concocted into three square meals and dessert. Grazing is a Southeast Asian art, cultivated in the hawker centres of Penang and Singapore or by itinerant vendors in Thailand and Vietnam. The cuisines – Indian curries, Chinese dim sum – reflect historic migrations, and the flavours flirt with the climate, balancing spicy, sweet, salty and sour.